

Mythic Planning Framework

1. Locating importance

What is emotionally engaging about this topic? How can it evoke wonder? Why should it matter to us?

In order to help students connect emotionally to the material, teachers need to first identify their own emotional attachment to it. A sense of wonder about something is usually connected to this attachment. Everything that we teach can evoke some kind of wonder and produce some emotional response in us. A sense of wonder and an emotional response to material are important in engaging students' imaginations. So this first question asks the teacher to feel for what is wonderful about the topic. This can be difficult if the topic is something like the use of the comma! The trick, though, is to try to re-see the topic through the eyes of the child, to catch at what can stimulate the sense of wonder about even the most routine topics. Especially when teachers have been taught to become expert at organizing classroom activities and structuring topics into instructional units, this can be hard. It is asking the teacher to do something that is, for most of us, quite unfamiliar—to begin by feeling about the topic. Try to indicate for any topic you plan to teach what is wonderful about it, and what can provide an emotional engagement to it by the child.

Sources of wonder:

Sources of emotional engagement:

2. Thinking about the content in story form

How can we shape the content so that it will have some emotional meaning? How can we best bring out that emotional meaning in a way that will engage the imagination?

2.1. Finding binary opposites:

What binary concepts best capture the wonder and emotion of the topic? If this were a story, what would the opposing forces be?

Now to the work of locating the best binary oppositions on which we can construct the “story” we are going to tell. It should be possible to select the one that seems best, though you might want to note some alternatives, in case you find the first set chosen doesn’t quite carry you through the lesson or unit as well as you might have expected.

Opposites:

Main opposition: /

Possible alternative: /

2.2. Finding images and drama:

***What parts of the topic most dramatically embody the binary concepts?
What image best captures that content and its dramatic contrast?***

Here the goal is to identify the drama inherent in the topic. Remember, every topic has some kind of dramatic conflict in it. Which conflict best illustrates the binary opposites we’ve identified? Again, as the teacher, trying to feel the drama is as important as thinking about it. This task, too, can be quite difficult at first. (It does become easier as we begin to recognize that there is something almost natural about thinking in these terms.) The drama of commas may not be so obvious, nor how one might break up one’s lessons about commas into binary opposites. But everything has within it something dramatic, and, as we’ll see, everything can be broken down into binary opposites. We are so accustomed to thinking about content, and about concepts, that we often forget that every topic also has a wide range of images attached to it. And the image, remember, can carry the emotional meaning of the topic and can also make the topic much more memorable—if we find a good image, of course. Look for a core conflict, contradiction or drama that seems to best convey the wonder and emotion of the topic.

Image that captures binary oppositions:

Content that reflects binary oppositions:

2.3. Structuring the body of the lesson or unit: ***How do we teach the content in a story form?***

Having done the hard work that has put in place the basic structuring elements--we've identified the binary opposites and the basic drama--it should be relatively easy to create a narrative plotline of the content. The opposites provide the cognitive and emotional framework of the story. Remember, all good fictional stories are built on a conflict or puzzle; the only difference here is that the "story" content is the curriculum content.

Sketch of overall story structure of the lesson/unit:

3. Conclusion

How does the story end? How do we resolve the conflict set up between the binary opposites? How much do we explain to the students about the binary oppositions? How do we give them some sense of the mystery attached to this topic?

Every story has an ending in which the conflict is in some way resolved or at least explained. For younger students a simple resolution may be appropriate; for older students an exploration of the opposites and the dramatic space between them can be explored. The conclusion can therefore take on many forms; from students' presentations, to displays, to a story that shows another form of the opposition being worked out, to dramatic presentations of the story with visuals, and so on. Remember, the conclusion is another opportunity for students to feel the drama of the story and internalize the material while expressing their understanding of it in imaginative ways.

Concluding activity:

4. Evaluation

How can one know whether the topic has been understood, its importance grasped, and the content learned?

Any of the traditional forms of evaluation can be used, but in addition, teachers might want to get some measure of how far students' imaginations have been engaged by the topic. Remember, various kinds of information evaluations, including discussion, debate, art work, journal writing, experiment analysis etc. can be done as the unit is being taught.

Forms of evaluation: